# Spending On Houses Defended

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The chief of the General Services Administration said yesterday his agency actually "detracted" from the property value of President Nixon's California and Florida homes by spending $3.6 million for landscaping and other changes.

Arthur F. Sampson told House Government Activities subcommittee that the GSA "made mistakes" on some of the changes, but it always "stayed carefully within the law." All but a few of the expenditures were requested by the Secret Service, he added.

"The work we did detracted from the value of the properties," Sampson insisted in a heated exchange with subcommittee members. "It did not improve the appearance of these properties, did not increase the comfort of the facilities, did not help pay for living expenses."

"Well," replied Chairman Jack Brooks (D-Tex.), "I'd like you to come down to my farm and descreate it a littlebit."

Rep. John C. Culver (D-Iowa) held up color pictures of the home in Key Biscayne, Fla., taken before and after the changes. Noting that sand had been replaced with grass, shrubs and flowers, he said, "It's an insult to the intelligence of this subcommittee . . . that you can say with a straight face that in no way did this enhance the value of these properties or improve the appearance."

GSA expenditures for landscaping, shrubbery, guardhouses, fencing and other changes were part of an estimated $10.1 million spent by the government at the two houses and surrounding facilities, about $5.7 million of it by the Defense Department.

Sampson said the GSA, which maintains and equips all government property, "never questioned" Secret Service orders for work on the homes. Many of these were oral, he said.